

## ON THE PRODUCT OF TWO $\pi$ -DECOMPOSABLE SOLUBLE GROUPS

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### Abstract

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Let the group  $G = AB$  be a product of two  $\pi$ -decomposable subgroups  $A = O_\pi(A) \times O_{\pi'}(A)$  and  $B = O_\pi(B) \times O_{\pi'}(B)$  where  $\pi$  is a set of primes. The authors conjecture that  $O_\pi(A)O_\pi(B) = O_\pi(B)O_\pi(A)$  if  $\pi$  is a set of odd primes. In this paper it is proved that the conjecture is true if  $A$  and  $B$  are soluble. A similar result with certain additional restrictions holds in the case  $2 \in \pi$ . Moreover, it is shown that the conjecture holds if  $O_{\pi'}(A)$  and  $O_{\pi'}(B)$  have coprime orders.

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### 1. Notation and Preliminaries

All groups considered are finite.

The aim of this paper is to study groups  $G = AB$  which are factorized as the product of  $\pi$ -decomposable subgroups  $A$  and  $B$ , for a set of primes  $\pi$ . A group  $X$  is said to be  $\pi$ -decomposable if  $X = X_\pi \times X_{\pi'}$  is the direct product of a  $\pi$ -subgroup and a  $\pi'$ -subgroup, where  $\pi'$  stands for the complementary of  $\pi$  in the set of all prime numbers. Moreover, we always use  $X_\pi$  to denote a Hall  $\pi$ -subgroup of any group  $X$ .

More precisely we take further the study that was started in [12]. The main result in that paper states the following:

**Theorem 1.** *Let  $\pi$  be a set of odd primes. Let the group  $G = AB$  be the product of a  $\pi$ -decomposable subgroup  $A$  and a  $\pi$ -subgroup  $B$ . Then  $A_\pi = O_\pi(A) \leq O_\pi(G)$ .*

It is worth recalling the following result, which is Lemma 1 in [12] and provides an equivalent statement to this theorem.

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**Lemma 1.** *Let the group  $G = AB$  be the product of a  $\pi$ -decomposable subgroup  $A = A_\pi \times A_{\pi'}$  and a  $\pi$ -subgroup  $B$ . Then the following statements are equivalent:*

- (i)  $A_\pi \leq O_\pi(G)$ ;
- (ii)  $G$  contains Hall  $\pi$ -subgroups and  $A_\pi B = BA_\pi$  is a Hall  $\pi$ -subgroup of  $G$ .

The starting point for our work is the theorem of Kegel and Wielandt which states the solubility of a group which is the product of two nilpotent subgroups.

For the proof of this theorem Kegel found a very useful criterion for the non-simplicity of a finite group in terms of some suitable permutability conditions on subgroups ([13, Satz 3]). It was improved by Wielandt in [15, Satz 1]. (See also [1, Lemmas 2.4.1, 2.5.1].) We state here a reformulation of these results which is convenient for our purposes.

**Lemma 2.** *Let the group  $G = AB$  be the product of the subgroups  $A$  and  $B$  and let  $A_0$  and  $B_0$  be normal subgroups of  $A$  and  $B$ , respectively. If  $A_0 B_0 = B_0 A_0$ , then  $A_0^g B_0 = B_0 A_0^g$  for all  $g \in G$ .*

*Assume in addition that  $A_0$  and  $B_0$  are  $\pi$ -groups for a set of primes  $\pi$ . If  $O_\pi(G) = 1$ , then  $[A_0^G, B_0^G] = 1$ .*

*(We note that this result is applicable in particular if  $A = A_\pi \times A_{\pi'}$  and  $B = B_\pi \times B_{\pi'}$  are  $\pi$ -decomposable and considering  $A_0 = A_\pi$  and  $B_0 = B_\pi$ .)*

*Proof:* Let  $g \in G$  and consider  $g = ab$  with  $a \in A$  and  $b \in B$ . Since  $A_0$  and  $B_0$  are normal subgroups of  $A$  and  $B$ , respectively, and they permute, we have:

$$A_0^g B_0 = A_0^{ab} B_0 = (A_0 B_0)^b = (B_0 A_0)^b = B_0 A_0^{ab} = B_0 A_0^g.$$

Now the final assertion follows from [1, Lemma 2.5.1].  $\square$

If  $G = AB$  is the product of nilpotent subgroups  $A$  and  $B$ , then the hypotheses of this result for  $A_0 = A_p$  and  $B_0 = B_p$ , the Sylow  $p$ -subgroups of  $A$  and  $B$ , respectively, and for any prime  $p$ , hold. This fact is in the core of the solubility of the group  $G$ .

Our aim is to find a more general structure involving  $\pi$ -decomposable groups for which these hypotheses also hold. Then, together with Lemma 2, our results also provide non-simplicity criteria for a group  $G$ .

Precisely we conjecture the following:

**Conjecture.** *Let  $\pi$  be a set of odd primes. Let the group  $G = AB$  be the product of two  $\pi$ -decomposable subgroups  $A = A_\pi \times A_{\pi'}$  and  $B = B_\pi \times B_{\pi'}$ . Then  $A_\pi B_\pi = B_\pi A_\pi$  and this is a Hall  $\pi$ -subgroup of  $G$ .*

Theorem 1 provides already a first approach to this conjecture. We state next another case for which the conjecture holds and that follows from Theorem 1. For notation, we set  $\pi(G)$  for the set of prime divisors of  $|G|$ , the order of the group  $G$ .

**Proposition 1.** *Let  $\pi$  be a set of odd primes. Let the group  $G = AB$  be the product of two  $\pi$ -decomposable subgroups  $A = A_\pi \times A_{\pi'}$  and  $B = B_\pi \times B_{\pi'}$ . Assume in addition that  $(|A_{\pi'}|, |B_{\pi'}|) = 1$ . Then  $A_\pi B_\pi = B_\pi A_\pi$ .*

*Proof:* Since  $2 \in \pi'$  and  $(|A_{\pi'}|, |B_{\pi'}|) = 1$  we may assume w.l.o.g. that  $2 \notin \pi(B)$ . Now we consider the set of odd primes  $\sigma := \pi(B) \cup \pi(A_\pi)$ . Then  $G$  is the product of the  $\sigma$ -decomposable subgroup  $A$  and the  $\sigma$ -subgroup  $B$ . From Theorem 1 it follows that  $B$  and  $A_\sigma = A_\pi$  permutes. Considering now the group  $BA_\pi$ , we can deduce that  $B_\pi$  permutes with  $A_\pi$  as desired.  $\square$

It is worthwhile emphasizing that the conjectured result holds in the significant case when  $(|A|, |B|) = 1$ . In particular, our results extend previous ones of Berkovič [4], Arad and Chillag [3], Rowley [14] and Kazarin [9], where products of a 2-decomposable group and a group of odd order, with coprime orders, were considered.

In this paper we will study as a first step the structure of a minimal counterexample to our conjecture. Afterwards we will prove it under the additional hypotheses that  $A$  and  $B$  are soluble groups. In the case of soluble factors, we will consider also the analogous problem when  $\pi$  is a set of primes containing the prime 2. As a consequence of these results we deduce in Corollary 1 a criterion of  $\pi$ -separability for a group which is the product of  $\pi$ -decomposable soluble factors, for an arbitrary set of primes  $\pi$ .

First we state some more notation. If  $n$  is an integer and  $p$  a prime number, we denote by  $n_p$  the largest power of  $p$  dividing  $n$ . A group  $G$  satisfies the  $C_\pi$ -property if  $G$  possesses a unique conjugacy class of Hall  $\pi$ -subgroups. Moreover  $G$  satisfies the  $D_\pi$ -property if it satisfies the  $C_\pi$ -property and every  $\pi$ -subgroup of  $G$  is contained in some Hall  $\pi$ -subgroup of  $G$ . We recall that a  $\pi$ -separable group satisfies the  $D_\pi$ -property.

We need specifically the following result (see [1, Corollary 1.3.3]).

**Lemma 3.** *Let the group  $G = AB$  be the product of the subgroups  $A$  and  $B$ . Then for each prime  $p$  there exist Sylow  $p$ -subgroups  $A_p$  of  $A$  and  $B_p$  of  $B$  such that  $A_p B_p$  is a Sylow  $p$ -subgroup of  $G$ .*

For products of soluble subgroups the following lemma will be also used.

**Lemma 4.** *Let  $G = AB = AN = BN$  be a group with  $A$  and  $B$  soluble subgroups of  $G$  and with a unique minimal normal subgroup  $N$ , which is non-abelian. Let  $N = N_1 \times \cdots \times N_r$  with  $N_1 \cong N_i$  be a non-abelian simple group,  $i = 1, \dots, r$ . Then:*

- (i)  *$A$  and  $B$  act transitively by conjugacy on the set  $\Omega = \{N_1, \dots, N_r\}$  of direct factors of  $N$ . Moreover,  $N \cap A = \times_{i=1}^r (N_i \cap A)$  and  $N \cap B = \times_{i=1}^r (N_i \cap B)$ .*
- (ii)  *$|N_1|$  divides  $|\text{Out}(N_1)||N_1 \cap A||N_1 \cap B|$ .*

*Proof:* See Lemmas 2.3 and 2.5 of [10]. □

## 2. The minimal counterexample

**Proposition 2.** *Let  $\pi$  be a set of odd primes. Assume that the group  $G = AB$  is the product of two  $\pi$ -decomposable subgroups  $A = A_\pi \times A_{\pi'}$  and  $B = B_\pi \times B_{\pi'}$ , and  $G$  is a counterexample of minimal order to the assertion  $A_\pi B_\pi = B_\pi A_\pi$ .*

*Then  $G$  has a unique minimal normal subgroup  $N = N_1 \times \cdots \times N_r$ , which is a direct product of isomorphic non-abelian simple groups  $N_1, \dots, N_r$ . Moreover  $G = AN = BN = AB$ ,  $(|A_{\pi'}|, |B_{\pi'}|) \neq 1$  and  $A_{\pi'} \cap B_{\pi'} = 1$ .*

*Proof:* First note that  $A_\pi \neq 1$  and  $B_\pi \neq 1$ . Moreover,  $|\pi(G) \cap \pi| > 1$ , because of Lemma 3, and also  $(|A_{\pi'}|, |B_{\pi'}|) \neq 1$  by Proposition 1; in particular,  $A_{\pi'} \neq 1$  and  $B_{\pi'} \neq 1$ . We split the proof into the following steps:

*Step 1.* The group  $G$  has a unique minimal normal subgroup  $N$ , which is neither a  $\pi$ -group nor a  $\pi'$ -group. In particular,  $N$  is not soluble. Consequently,  $N = N_1 \times \cdots \times N_r$  with  $N_1 \cong N_i$  a non-abelian simple group,  $i = 1, \dots, r$ .

Let  $N$  be a minimal normal subgroup of  $G$  and assume that there exists  $M \neq N$  another minimal normal subgroup of  $G$ . The choice of  $G$  implies that  $A_\pi B_\pi N/N$  is a subgroup of  $G/N$  and  $A_\pi B_\pi M/M$  is a subgroup of  $G/M$ . Then

$$O^\pi(\langle A_\pi, B_\pi \rangle) \leq N \cap M = 1.$$

This implies that  $\langle A_\pi, B_\pi \rangle$  is a  $\pi$ -group and, consequently,  $\langle A_\pi, B_\pi \rangle = A_\pi B_\pi$ , a contradiction.

If  $N$  is a  $\pi$ -group, then  $\langle A_\pi, B_\pi \rangle \leq A_\pi B_\pi N$  is a  $\pi$ -group which implies the contradiction  $\langle A_\pi, B_\pi \rangle = A_\pi B_\pi$ , as  $|A_\pi B_\pi| = |G|_\pi$  is the largest  $\pi$ -number dividing  $|G|$ .

Assume now that  $N$  is a  $\pi'$ -group. Note that

$$|A_\pi(B_\pi N)| = \frac{|A_\pi||B_\pi||N|}{|A_\pi \cap B_\pi N|}$$

and so  $|A_\pi B_\pi N/N|$  is a  $\pi$ -number. Consequently,  $X := A_\pi B_\pi N$  is a  $\pi$ -separable group and, in particular, it satisfies the  $D_\pi$ -property. We deduce now that there exists a Hall  $\pi$ -subgroup  $X_\pi$  of  $X$  and an element  $x \in X$  such that  $A_\pi B_\pi^x \subseteq \langle A_\pi, B_\pi^x \rangle \leq X_\pi$ . But  $|A_\pi B_\pi^x| = |G|_\pi$  which implies in particular that  $A_\pi B_\pi^x = X_\pi$  is a subgroup of  $G$ . Since  $G = AB$  and  $A_\pi$  and  $B_\pi$  are normal subgroups of  $A$  and  $B$  respectively, it follows that  $A_\pi B_\pi$  is a subgroup of  $G$ .

Put now  $H = \langle A_\pi, B_\pi \rangle$ . Then the following properties hold:

*Step 2.*  $N \leq H \trianglelefteq G$ .

From [1, Lemma 1.2.2] we have that  $N_G(H) = N_A(H)N_B(H)$ . If  $N_G(H)$  is a proper subgroup of  $G$ , then  $A_\pi B_\pi$  is a subgroup of  $G$  by the choice of  $G$ , which is a contradiction. Hence  $H$  is a normal subgroup of  $G$  and so  $N \leq H$ .

*Step 3.*  $G = AH = BH = AB$ .

Observe that  $AH = A(AH \cap B)$ . If  $AH$  is a proper subgroup of  $G$ , then the choice of  $G$  implies again the contradiction  $A_\pi B_\pi = B_\pi A_\pi$ . Therefore  $G = AH$  and, analogously,  $G = BH$ .

*Step 4.*  $H = A_\pi B_\pi N$ .

This is clear since  $A_\pi B_\pi N$  is a subgroup of  $G$  and  $N \leq H \leq A_\pi B_\pi N \leq H$ .

*Step 5.*  $A_{\pi'}N = B_{\pi'}N = A_{\pi'}B_{\pi'}N$ .

Since  $G = AH = AB_\pi N$ , we deduce that

$$\begin{aligned} B &= B_\pi(B \cap AN) = B_\pi((B_\pi \cap AN) \times (B_{\pi'} \cap AN)) \\ &= B_\pi(B_{\pi'} \cap AN) = B_\pi B_{\pi'}. \end{aligned}$$

Then  $B_{\pi'} = B_{\pi'} \cap AN$ , that is,  $B_{\pi'} \leq AN$  and, consequently,  $B_{\pi'} \leq A_{\pi'}N$ .

Analogously the equality  $G = BH = BA_\pi N$  implies that  $A_{\pi'} \leq B_{\pi'}N$ .

Therefore  $A_{\pi'}N = B_{\pi'}N = A_{\pi'}B_{\pi'}N$ .

*Step 6.*  $G/N = O_{\pi'}(G/N) \times O_\pi(G/N)$ .

Note first that  $H/N = A_\pi B_\pi N/N \in \text{Hall}_\pi(G/N)$  and  $H/N \trianglelefteq G/N$ . On the other hand, we deduce from Step 5 that  $A_{\pi'}N/N = B_{\pi'}N/N$  is a Hall  $\pi'$ -subgroup of  $G/N$  normalized by  $AN/N$  and by  $BN/N$ , that is, it is normal in  $G/N$ , and the assertion follows.

*Step 7.*  $A_{\pi'} \cap B_{\pi'} = 1$ .

If  $L = A_{\pi'} \cap B_{\pi'}$ , then  $N \leq \langle A_{\pi}, B_{\pi} \rangle \leq C_G(L)$ , and so  $L \leq C_G(N) = 1$ .

*Step 8.* Assume that  $1 \neq M \trianglelefteq G$  and  $K := AM \neq G$ . Then  $O_{\pi}(K) = 1$ ,  $A_{\pi}\tilde{B}_{\pi} \in \text{Hall}_{\pi}(K)$  and  $[A_{\pi}^K, \tilde{B}_{\pi}^K] = 1$ , where  $\tilde{B}_{\pi} := B_{\pi} \cap AM = B_{\pi} \cap A_{\pi}M$ . Moreover,  $\tilde{B}_{\pi} \neq 1$  and  $B_{\pi} \cap M = \tilde{B}_{\pi} \cap M = 1$ .

First observe that  $[O_{\pi}(K), N] \leq O_{\pi}(K) \cap N = 1$ , which implies  $O_{\pi}(K) \leq C_G(N) = 1$ . Moreover, since  $K = AM = A(AM \cap B) < G$ , the choice of  $G$  implies that  $T := A_{\pi}\tilde{B}_{\pi} = \tilde{B}_{\pi}A_{\pi} \in \text{Hall}_{\pi}(K)$ . Hence, from Lemma 2, it follows that  $[A_{\pi}^K, \tilde{B}_{\pi}^K] = 1$ .

Suppose now that  $\tilde{B}_{\pi} = 1$ . Then  $T = A_{\pi} \in \text{Hall}_{\pi}(K)$  and  $A_{\pi} \cap M \in \text{Hall}_{\pi}(M)$ . Note that  $A_{\pi} \cap M \neq 1$  because otherwise  $M$  would be a  $\pi'$ -group, which contradicts Step 1. Since  $\pi$  is a set of odd primes, then  $M$  satisfies the  $C_{\pi}$ -property by [8, Theorem A] and so, by the Frattini argument, we conclude that  $G = MN_G(A_{\pi} \cap M)$ . Hence

$$|G : N_G(A_{\pi} \cap M)| = |M : N_M(A_{\pi} \cap M)|$$

is a  $\pi'$ -number, since  $A_{\pi} \cap M \in \text{Hall}_{\pi}(N_M(A_{\pi} \cap M))$ , and so  $|G|_{\pi} = |N_G(A_{\pi} \cap M)|_{\pi}$ . Note also that  $N_G(A_{\pi} \cap M) \neq G$ , by Step 1. Then, by the choice of  $G$ ,  $N_G(A_{\pi} \cap M) = A(B_{\pi} \cap N_G(A_{\pi} \cap M)) \times (B_{\pi'} \cap N_G(A_{\pi} \cap M))$  satisfies the theorem, that is,

$$A_{\pi}(B_{\pi} \cap N_G(A_{\pi} \cap M)) \in \text{Hall}_{\pi}(N_G(A_{\pi} \cap M)).$$

But  $|A_{\pi}(B_{\pi} \cap N_G(A_{\pi} \cap M))| = |N_G(A_{\pi} \cap M)|_{\pi} = |G|_{\pi} = |A_{\pi}B_{\pi}|$  implies that  $B_{\pi} \cap N_G(A_{\pi} \cap M) = B_{\pi}$  and so  $A_{\pi}B_{\pi}$  is a subgroup, a contradiction. This proves that  $\tilde{B}_{\pi} \neq 1$ .

Finally note that  $B_{\pi} \cap M = \tilde{B}_{\pi} \cap M$  is normalized by both  $B_{\pi}$  and  $A_{\pi}$  because  $[A_{\pi}, \tilde{B}_{\pi}] = 1$ . Hence  $N \leq \langle A_{\pi}, B_{\pi} \rangle$  normalizes  $B_{\pi} \cap M$  and so  $[B_{\pi} \cap M, N] \leq B_{\pi} \cap M \cap N = B_{\pi} \cap N = 1$ , since this is a  $\pi$ -group normalized by  $N$ . Therefore  $B_{\pi} \cap M \leq C_G(N) = 1$  and the last assertion follows.

*Step 9.*  $A$  acts transitively on the set  $\Omega = \{N_1, \dots, N_r\}$ .

Assume that this is not true and take  $R := \cap_{i=1}^r N_G(N_i) \trianglelefteq G$ . Then  $AR < G$  and we can apply Step 8 with  $M = R$ . In particular, from the facts that  $\tilde{B}_{\pi} = B_{\pi} \cap AR \neq 1$  and  $B_{\pi} \cap R = \tilde{B}_{\pi} \cap R = 1$  we deduce that  $\tilde{B}_{\pi} \not\leq R$ . Then there exists  $1 \neq b \in \tilde{B}_{\pi} \setminus R$ . Without loss of generality we may assume that  $b \notin N_G(N_1)$ , and so  $|\Omega_{\langle b \rangle}(N_1)| \geq 2$ , where  $\Omega_{\langle b \rangle}(N_1)$  denotes the orbit of  $N_1$  under the action of  $b$  on  $\Omega = \{N_1, \dots, N_r\}$ . On the other hand, since  $\tilde{B}_{\pi} \leq RA_{\pi}$ , then  $b = ca$  for some  $c \in R$  and  $a \in A_{\pi}$ . Since  $R$  normalizes each  $N_i$ , we have  $\Omega_{\langle b \rangle}(N_1) = \Omega_{\langle a \rangle}(N_1)$ . Now note that  $[N_1, \langle b \rangle] = N_{i_1} \times \dots \times N_{i_k}$ , where  $\Omega_{\langle b \rangle}(N_1) = \{N_1 =$

$N_{i_1}, \dots, N_{i_k}\} \subseteq \Omega$ . Analogously,  $[N_1, \langle a \rangle] = N_{i_1} \times \dots \times N_{i_k} = [N_1, \langle b \rangle]$ . Therefore  $[N_1, \langle a \rangle] = [N_1, \langle b \rangle] \leq [N_1, \tilde{B}_\pi] \cap [N_1, A_\pi]$ . Now from Step 8 we have that

$$[[N_1, \tilde{B}_\pi], [N_1, A_\pi]] \leq [A_\pi^K, \tilde{B}_\pi^K] = 1$$

and so  $N_1, N_{i_2}, \dots, N_{i_k}$  are abelian, which is a contradiction. The assertion is now proved.

*Step 10.*  $G = AN = BN = AB$ .

Assume that this is not true and, for instance,  $AN < G$ . Then we can apply Step 8 with  $M = N$ . In particular,  $[A_\pi^K, \tilde{B}_\pi^K] = 1$ , where  $K = AN$ ,  $\tilde{B}_\pi = B_\pi \cap AN = B_\pi \cap A_\pi N$  and  $\tilde{B}_\pi \neq 1$ . Since  $C_G(N) = 1$  we may assume that there exists  $1 \neq b \in \tilde{B}_\pi$  such that  $[N_1, \langle b \rangle] \neq 1$ . But this means that  $N_1 \leq [N_1, \langle b \rangle]$  and  $A_\pi$  centralizes this subgroup. Since  $A$  acts transitively on  $\Omega = \{N_1, \dots, N_r\}$  and  $A_\pi \trianglelefteq A$ , it follows that  $A_\pi$  centralizes each  $N_i$ , for  $i = 1, \dots, r$ , and so  $A_\pi \leq C_G(N) = 1$ , a contradiction which proves that  $AN = G$ .

By the symmetry between  $A$  and  $B$  we can also prove  $G = BN$  and we are done.  $\square$

### 3. The soluble case with $\pi$ a set of odd primes

**Theorem 2.** *Let  $\pi$  be a set of odd primes. Let the group  $G = AB$  be the product of two  $\pi$ -decomposable soluble subgroups  $A = A_\pi \times A_{\pi'}$  and  $B = B_\pi \times B_{\pi'}$ . Then  $A_\pi B_\pi = B_\pi A_\pi$  and this is a Hall  $\pi$ -subgroup of  $G$ .*

*Proof:* Assume the result is not true and let  $G$  be a counterexample of minimal order. We know by Proposition 2 that  $G$  has a unique minimal normal subgroup  $N = N_1 \times \dots \times N_r$ , which is a direct product of isomorphic non-abelian simple groups  $N_1, \dots, N_r$ . Moreover,  $G = AB = AN = BN$  and so, by Lemma 4,  $A$  and  $B$  act transitively on the set  $\Omega = \{N_1, \dots, N_r\}$  and  $|N_1|$  divides  $|\text{Out}(N_1)||N_1 \cap A||N_1 \cap B|$ . Clearly  $A_\pi \neq 1$ ,  $B_\pi \neq 1$ , and, moreover,  $A_{\pi'} \neq 1$ ,  $B_{\pi'} \neq 1$ . Recall also that  $A_{\pi'} \cap B_{\pi'} = 1$ .

From [10] we know that  $N_i$  should be isomorphic to one of the groups in the set:

$$\mathfrak{M} = \{L_2(q), q > 3; L_3(q), q < 9; L_4(2), M_{11}, \text{PSp}_4(3), U_3(8)\}.$$

We claim first that  $N = N_1$  is a simple group.

We note that either  $N_1 \cap A \neq 1$  or  $N_1 \cap B \neq 1$  because  $|N_1|$  does not divide  $|\text{Out}(N_1)|$ . We set  $\{\sigma, \sigma'\} = \{\pi, \pi'\}$ . We may assume that  $N_1 \cap A_\sigma \neq 1$ . Then  $A_{\sigma'}$  normalizes  $N_1$ . This holds also for  $B_{\sigma'}$  because  $A_{\sigma'}N = B_{\sigma'}N$  since  $G = AN = BN$ . If in addition  $N_1 \cap A_{\sigma'} \neq 1$  we

have also that  $A_\sigma$  normalizes  $N_1$  and consequently  $N = N_1$  is simple, since  $G = AN$ , and the claim is proved. We get analogously to the same conclusion if  $N_1 \cap B_{\sigma'} \neq 1$ . Let us assume now that  $N_1 \cap A_{\sigma'} = 1 = N_1 \cap B_{\sigma'}$ . In particular,  $N_1 \cap A$  and  $N_1 \cap B$  are  $\sigma$ -groups. On the other hand, we recall that  $N$  is not a  $\sigma$ -group. Hence  $1 \neq |N_1|_{\sigma'}$  divides  $|\text{Out}(N_1)|$ . We discard next this case by checking the different possibilities for  $N_1$ :

- $N_1 \in \mathfrak{M}$ ,  $N_1 \not\cong M_{11}$ ,  $N_1 \not\cong L_2(q)$ ,  $q = p^n$ . If  $r$  is a prime dividing  $|\text{Out}(N_1)|$ , then  $r \in \{2, 3\}$ . But in all the considered cases  $|N_1|_r > |\text{Out}(N_1)|_r$  and so these are not possible cases for  $N_1$ .
- $N_1 \cong M_{11}$ . This case cannot occur since  $\text{Out}(M_{11}) = 1$ .
- $N_1 \cong L_2(q)$ ,  $q = p^n$ . From Lemma 4 we have that  $N \cap A = \times_{i=1}^r (N_i \cap A)$ , and so  $N \cap A_{\sigma'} = \times_{i=1}^r (N_i \cap A_{\sigma'}) = 1$ . Moreover, since  $A_{\sigma'}$  normalizes  $N_1$ , it normalizes  $N_i$  for any  $i = 1, \dots, r$ , because  $A$  acts transitively on the set  $\Omega = \{N_1, \dots, N_r\}$ . Therefore  $A_{\sigma'} \cong A_{\sigma'} N/N$  is a subgroup of  $\text{Out}(N_1) \times \dots \times \text{Out}(N_r)$ . Analogously  $B_{\sigma'} \cong B_{\sigma'} N/N$ . Moreover  $A_{\sigma'} N/N = B_{\sigma'} N/N$ . By the structure of  $\text{Out}(L_2(q))$  we deduce that there exists a prime  $r \in \sigma'$  such that  $A$  and  $B$  have normal Sylow  $r$ -subgroups. From Lemmas 3 and 2 we deduce that  $N$  is abelian, which is a contradiction.

Therefore our claim follows and  $N$  is a simple group.

We recall that  $G = AN = BN = AB$  and so we deduce that  $|N||A \cap B| = |N \cap A||N \cap B||G/N|$ . In particular, if  $X, Y$  are maximal soluble subgroups of  $N$  such that  $N \cap A \leq X$  and  $N \cap B \leq Y$ , then  $|N|$  divides  $|X||Y||\text{Out}(N)|$ . Then we will use the fact that the orders of  $X$  and  $Y$  are known from the proof of [2, Lemma 2.5].

We recall also that  $A_\pi \neq 1$ ,  $B_\pi \neq 1$ ,  $A_{\pi'} \neq 1$ ,  $B_{\pi'} \neq 1$ . Moreover, we have that  $|\pi(G) \cap \pi| > 1$  and  $|\pi(G) \cap \pi'| > 1$  because of Lemmas 3 and 2, as  $N$  is non-abelian.

We check next that each of the possibilities for the group  $N$  leads to a contradiction.

- $N \cong L_3(3)$  and  $N \cong \text{PSp}_4(3)$ . In both cases  $|G|$  would be divided only by three distinct primes which is a contradiction.
- $N \cong M_{11}$ . In this case  $\text{Out}(N) = 1$  and so  $G = N$  is simple. Since all subgroups of the group  $M_{11}$  are known, it is easily deduced that this case cannot occur.



•  $N \cong L_3(4)$  or  $N \cong L_3(7)$ . These cases can be excluded since, as proved in [2, Lemma 2.5], for these groups it is not possible that  $|N|$  divides  $|X||Y||\text{Out}(N)|$ , for soluble subgroups  $X$  and  $Y$  of  $N$ .

•  $N \cong L_3(5)$ . In this case  $|N| = 2^5 \cdot 3 \cdot 5^3 \cdot 31$  and  $|\text{Out}(N)| = 2$ . By [2, Lemma 2.5] we may suppose w.l.o.g. that  $|N \cap A|$  divides  $31 \cdot 3$  and  $|N \cap B|$  divides  $2^4 \cdot 5^3$ . Hence the case  $G = N$  cannot occur by order arguments. So  $|G/N| = 2$  and  $G \cong \text{Aut}(N)$ . This means that  $|N \cap A| = 31 \cdot 3$  and  $|N \cap B| = 2^4 \cdot 5^3$ . Since  $B$  is neither a  $\pi$ -group nor a  $\pi'$ -group and  $2 \in \pi'$  it should be  $5 \in \pi$ . This fact forces the primes 3 and 31 to be in different sets of primes. But this also leads to a contradiction, since a Sylow 31-subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing.

•  $N \cong L_3(8)$ . In this case  $|N| = 2^9 \cdot 3^2 \cdot 7^2 \cdot 73$  and by [2, Lemma 2.5] we may assume that  $|N \cap A|$  divides  $73 \cdot 3$  and  $|N \cap B|$  divides  $2^9 \cdot 7^2$ . Since  $|\text{Out}(N)| = 2 \cdot 3$  and  $|N|$  divides  $|G/N||N \cap A||N \cap B|$ , the cases  $G = N$  and  $|G/N| = 2$  are not possible by order arguments.

If either  $|G/N| = 3$  or  $|G/N| = 2 \cdot 3$ , it follows that  $|N \cap A| = 73 \cdot 3$ . Since a Sylow 73-subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing in  $\text{Aut}(N)$ , we can deduce that  $A$  is either a  $\pi$ -group or a  $\pi'$ -group, a contradiction.

•  $N \cong L_4(2) \cong A_8$ . In this case, there is no factorization  $G = AB$  with  $A, B$  soluble subgroups.

•  $N \cong U_3(8)$ . Then  $|N| = 2^9 \cdot 3^4 \cdot 7 \cdot 19$  and  $|\text{Out}(N)| = 2 \cdot 3^2$ . By [2, Lemma 2.5], we may assume that  $|N \cap A|$  divides  $3 \cdot 19$  and  $|N \cap B|$  divides  $2^9 \cdot 7 \cdot 3$ . Hence by order arguments it follows that  $|G| \geq |N| \cdot 3^2$ . Note also that since  $\text{Out}(N)$  is not a direct product of a 2-group and a 3-group,  $G/N$  should be a  $\pi$ -group or a  $\pi'$ -group. By [2, Lemma 2.5], we may assume that  $|N \cap A|$  divides  $3 \cdot 19$  and  $|N \cap B|$  divides  $2^9 \cdot 7 \cdot 3$ .

If  $|G/N| = 3^2$ , then  $|N \cap A| = 3 \cdot 19$  and  $|N \cap B| = 2^9 \cdot 7 \cdot 3$ . Now the fact that a Sylow 19-subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing in  $N$  forces 3 and 19 to belong to the same set of primes, that is,  $\pi \cap \pi(G) = \{3, 19\}$  and  $\pi' \cap \pi(G) = \{2, 7\}$ . But then  $A$  would be a  $\pi$ -group, a contradiction.

Now assume that  $|G/N| = 2 \cdot 3^2$ , that is,  $G \cong \text{Aut}(N)$ . Then  $|N \cap A| = 3 \cdot 19$ ,  $|N \cap B| = 2^8 \cdot 7 \cdot 3$  and 2, 3 are in the same set of primes, that is,  $\pi' \cap \pi(G) = \{2, 3\}$  and  $\pi \cap \pi(G) = \{7, 19\}$ . But this cannot occur again because a Sylow 19-subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing.

•  $N \cong L_2(q)$ ,  $q = p^n$ .

Recall that, in this case,  $|N| = \epsilon q(q^2 - 1)$ ,  $\epsilon = (p - 1, 2)^{-1}$ , and  $\text{Out}(N)$  is a cyclic group of order  $\epsilon^{-1}n$ . From [2, Lemma 2.5] it follows that, apart from some exceptional cases with  $q \in \{5, 7, 11, 23\}$  that we

will study later, the maximal soluble subgroups  $X$  and  $Y$  of  $N$  satisfies the condition  $\{X, Y\} = \{N_N(N_p), D_{\nu(q+1)}\}$ , with  $N_p \in \text{Syl}_p(N)$ ,  $|N_N(N_p)| = \epsilon q(q-1)$  and  $D_{\nu(q+1)}$  a dihedral group of order  $\nu(q+1)$  with  $\nu = (2, p)$ .

We claim that  $p$  does not divide  $(|N \cap A|, |N \cap B|)$ . Assume first that  $p \in \pi$ . If  $p$  would divide  $(|N \cap A|, |N \cap B|)$ , then  $A_{\pi'} \cap N = 1 = B_{\pi'} \cap N$ , since the centralizer of any element of order  $p$  in  $N$  is a  $p$ -group. Therefore  $A_{\pi'} \cong A_{\pi'}N/N$  is a subgroup of  $\text{Out}(N)$  and, analogously,  $B_{\pi'} \cong B_{\pi'}N/N$ . Moreover,  $A_{\pi'}N/N = B_{\pi'}N/N$ . By the structure of  $\text{Out}(N)$  we deduce that there exists a prime  $r \in \pi'$  such that  $A$  and  $B$  have normal Sylow  $r$ -subgroups. Again from Lemmas 3 and 2 we get the contradiction that  $N$  is abelian. Note that the same conclusion follows if  $p \in \pi'$ .

Assume, therefore, w.l.o.g. that  $p$  does not divide  $|N \cap A|$ . Hence we can deduce that  $|N \cap B|$  divides  $|N_N(N_p)| = q(q-1)/(2, q-1)$  and  $|N \cap A|$  divides  $|D_{\nu(q+1)}| = \nu(q+1)$ . In particular, it follows that  $N \cap B$  is either a  $\pi$ -group or a  $\pi'$ -group, since the centralizer of any element of order  $p$  in  $N$  is a  $p$ -group.

We claim now that  $p$  divides  $|G/N|$  and, in particular,  $n > 1$ . Since  $|N|$  divides  $|G/N||N \cap A||N \cap B|$ , if  $p$  does not divide  $|G/N|$ , it follows that  $|N|_p = |N \cap B|_p$ . Then a Sylow  $p$ -subgroup of  $N \cap B$  is a Sylow  $p$ -subgroup of  $N$  contained in  $B$ . Hence  $B$  must be a  $\pi$ -group or a  $\pi'$ -group, because the centralizer in  $\text{Aut}(N)$  of any Sylow  $p$ -subgroup of  $N$  is a  $p$ -group by [11, 1.17], which is a contradiction.

We have that  $G/N = BN/N$  and also that  $|N|_p$  divides  $|G/N|_p|N \cap B|_p$ . Since  $B_{\pi} \neq 1$ ,  $B_{\pi'} \neq 1$  and  $n > 1$ , it is clear that there exists some outer automorphism  $\phi$  centralizing a Sylow  $p$ -subgroup of  $N \cap B$ . Then it follows that  $|C_N(\phi)|_p \geq |N \cap B|_p \geq q/n$ . But  $|C_N(\phi)|_p \leq q^{1/2}$  (see, for instance, [5, Chapter 12]). Hence  $q \leq q^{1/2}n$ , that is,  $q = p^n \leq n^2$ . This leads to a contradiction, except for the cases  $p = 2$  and  $n \leq 4$ .

The case  $(p, n) = (2, 3)$  can be easily excluded, since the group  $L_2(2^3) = L_2(8)$  has order divisible only by three distinct primes. Finally, the case  $(p, n) = (2, 4)$  is also excluded, because in this case  $B$  would be a  $\pi'$ -group, which is not possible.

For  $q \in \{5, 7, 11, 23\}$  there exists another possibility for the maximal soluble subgroups  $X$  and  $Y$  (see [2, Lemma 2.5]). But note that in all these cases  $G = N$  and one of the subgroups  $A = N \cap A$  or  $B = N \cap B$  is contained in  $N_N(N_p)$  for some  $N_p \in \text{Syl}_p(N)$ . Then  $A$  or

$B$  should be either a  $\pi$ -group or a  $\pi'$ -group, which provides the final contradiction.  $\square$

#### 4. The soluble case with $2 \in \pi$

**Theorem 3.** *Let  $\pi$  be a set of primes with  $2 \in \pi$ . Let the group  $G = AB$  be the product of two soluble  $\pi$ -decomposable subgroups  $A = A_\pi \times A_{\pi'}$  and  $B = B_\pi \times B_{\pi'}$ . Assume that the following simple groups are not involved in  $G$ :*

- (i)  $L_2(2^n)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , except if either  $n = 3$  or  $q = 2^n + 1 > 5$  is a Fermat prime,
- (ii)  $L_2(q)$ ,  $q > 3$  odd, except if  $q$  is a Mersenne prime.

*Then  $A_\pi B_\pi = B_\pi A_\pi$  and this is a Hall  $\pi$ -subgroup of  $G$ .*

*Proof:* Assume the result is not true and let  $G$  be a counterexample of minimal order. Obviously  $A_\pi \neq 1$  and  $B_\pi \neq 1$ . Moreover  $|\pi(G) \cap \pi| > 1$  because of Lemma 3.

We can argue as in Step 1 of Proposition 2 to deduce that  $G$  has a unique minimal normal subgroup  $N$ , which is neither a  $\pi$ -group nor a  $\pi'$ -group. We note that  $N = N_1 \times \cdots \times N_r$ , where  $N_i$  are isomorphic non-abelian simple groups for  $i = 1, \dots, r$ ,  $C_G(N) = 1$  and  $N \trianglelefteq G \leq \text{Aut}(N)$ .

On the other hand, we have by Theorem 2 that  $A_{\pi'} B_{\pi'}$  is a Hall  $\pi'$ -subgroup of  $G$ . Consequently, if  $A_{\pi'} \neq 1$  and  $B_{\pi'} \neq 1$ , it would follow from Lemma 2 the contradiction  $[N, N] \leq [A_{\pi'}^G, B_{\pi'}^G] = 1$ . Therefore, w.l.o.g. we may assume that  $B_{\pi'} = 1$ , i.e.,  $B = B_\pi$ , and  $A_{\pi'} \neq 1$ . We recall that now Lemma 1 implies that the conditions  $A_\pi B_\pi = B_\pi A_\pi$  and  $A_\pi \leq O_\pi(G)$  are equivalent.

We claim first that  $G = A_\pi N$  and  $N$  is a simple group.

The choice of  $G$  implies that  $A_\pi N/N \leq T/N := O_\pi(G/N)(BN/N)$ . In particular,  $N \leq T = A_\pi(T \cap A_{\pi'})B$ . If  $T$  were a proper subgroup of  $G$ , then  $A_\pi \leq O_\pi(T) \leq C_G(N) = 1$ , which is a contradiction. Consequently  $G/N$  is a  $\pi$ -group and, in particular,  $A_{\pi'} \leq N$ . Then  $X := A_\pi N = A(B \cap X)$ . If  $X$  were a proper subgroup of  $G$ , we would argue as above to conclude the contradiction  $A_\pi \leq O_\pi(X) = 1$ . Therefore  $X = A_\pi N = G$ .

We can deduce now that  $A_{\pi'} = (N_1 \cap A_{\pi'}) \times \cdots \times (N_r \cap A_{\pi'})$  is a Hall  $\pi'$ -subgroup of  $N$  and  $A_\pi$  acts transitively by conjugacy on the components  $N_1, \dots, N_r$  of  $N$ . This implies  $r = 1$ , that is,  $N$  is a simple group and the claim is proved.

We prove next that  $G = BN$ .

Assume that  $NB < G$ . We claim that  $N = BA_{\pi'}$ ,  $N \cap A_\pi = 1$  and  $|A_\pi| = t$  for some prime  $t$ .

Let us consider  $M := NB = B(NB \cap A) = BA_{\pi'}(NB \cap A_{\pi})$ . If we denote  $R = NB \cap A_{\pi}$ , we deduce by the choice of  $G$  that  $R \leq O_{\pi}(M) = 1$  and, in particular,  $N \cap A_{\pi} = 1$ . Since  $G = NA_{\pi} = (NB)A_{\pi}$ , we deduce that  $|N| = |NB|$  and so  $B \leq N = BA_{\pi'}$ .

Now let  $C$  be a subgroup of  $A_{\pi}$  of order  $t$ , for some prime  $t$ , and assume that  $X := NC = BA_{\pi'}C$  is a proper subgroup of  $G$ . Again we deduce that  $C \leq O_{\pi}(X) = 1$ , a contradiction. Therefore,  $|A_{\pi}| = t$  for some prime  $t$ .

Since  $N$  is a non-abelian simple group factorized as the product of two soluble subgroups of coprime orders, we have from [10] and [7, Theorem 1.1] that  $N$  should be isomorphic to one of the following:  $M_{11}$ ,  $L_3(3)$ ,  $L_2(q)$  with  $q > 3$  odd and  $q \equiv -1(4)$ ,  $L_2(8)$  and  $L_2(2^n)$  with  $2^n + 1 > 5$  a Fermat prime. (Recall that the remainder cases for  $L_2(2^n)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , are excluded by hypothesis.) We discard next all these possibilities for the group  $N$  which will show that  $G = NB$ .

- $N \cong M_{11}$ .

We have that  $A_{\pi} \neq 1$  is isomorphic to a subgroup of  $\text{Out}(M_{11}) = 1$ , a contradiction.

- $N \cong L_3(3)$ .

In this case  $\pi \cap \pi(G) = \{2, 3\}$  and  $\pi' \cap \pi(G) = \{13\}$ . Moreover the outer automorphism of order 2 of  $N$  should centralize a Sylow 13-subgroup of  $N$  but this is not true.

- $N \cong L_2(q)$ ,  $q > 3$  a Mersenne prime.

In this case  $|\text{Out}(N)| = 2$ , so  $A_{\pi}$  has order 2.

The possible factorizations for  $N$  can be found in [7]. So we have that  $\{B, A_{\pi'}\}$  should be a pair of subgroups of  $N$  among pairs of subgroups of  $N$  of type  $\{N_N(N_q), D_{q+1}\}$ , with  $N_q \in \text{Syl}_q(N)$  and  $D_{q+1}$  a dihedral group of order  $q+1$ . Moreover the subgroups in these pairs are maximal subgroups of  $N$ . Since  $2 \in \pi$  and 2 divides  $q+1$  we have  $B = D_{q+1}$  and  $A_{\pi'} = N_N(N_q)$ ; in particular  $q \in \pi'$ . But then it is not possible that  $A_{\pi}$  centralizes  $A_{\pi'} = N_N(N_q)$ , since  $C_{\text{Aut}(N)}(N_q)$  is a  $q$ -group by [11, 1.17].

- $N \cong L_2(2^n)$ , for either  $n = 3$  or  $2^n + 1 > 5$  is a Fermat prime.

The only factorizations of  $L_2(q)$ ,  $q = 2^n$ , as product of soluble subgroups of coprime orders should be among pairs of subgroups of  $N$  of type  $\{N_N(N_2), C_{q+1}\}$ , with  $C_{q+1}$  a cyclic group of order  $q+1$  and  $N_2 \in \text{Syl}_2(N)$  (see for instance [7]). Since  $2 \in \pi$  we have  $B = N_N(N_2)$  and  $A_{\pi'} = C_{q+1}$ . But then there exists an outer automorphism of order  $t$  in  $A_{\pi}$  centralizing the subgroup  $A_{\pi'} = C_{q+1}$  which is not the case.

Now we have proved that  $G = AN = BN = AB$  and so  $|N||A \cap B| = |N \cap A||N \cap B||G/N|$ . From now on  $X$  and  $Y$  will denote maximal soluble subgroups of  $N$  such that  $N \cap A \leq X$  and  $N \cap B \leq Y$ , respectively, and we will use [2, Lemma 2.5]. We check next that each of the possibilities for the group  $N$  leads to a contradiction which will conclude the proof. Recall that we have excluded the cases  $L_2(2^n)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , except if either  $n = 3$  or  $r = 2^n + 1 > 5$  is a Fermat prime, and the cases  $L_2(q)$ ,  $q$  odd, except if  $q$  is a Mersenne prime.

- $N \cong L_3(3)$ . In this case  $|N| = 3^3 \cdot 2^4 \cdot 13$  and  $|\text{Out}(N)| = 2$ . Moreover,  $X$  and  $Y$  should satisfy  $\{|X|, |Y|\} = \{13 \cdot 3, 3^3 \cdot 2^4\}$ . By order arguments  $2^3 \cdot 3^3$  divides either  $|N \cap A|$  or  $|N \cap B|$ . Then, since a Sylow 3-subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing, we have  $\pi \cap \pi(G) = \{2, 3\}$  and  $\pi' \cap \pi(G) = \{13\}$ . Moreover, since a Sylow 13-subgroup of  $N$  is also self-centralizing, the case  $|N \cap A| = 13 \cdot 3$  is not possible and so  $|N \cap A| = 13$ . Hence the case  $G = N$  cannot occur and it follows  $G \cong \text{Aut}(G)$ . But in this case, there would exist an automorphism of  $N$  of order 2 centralizing a Sylow 13-subgroup of  $N$ , which is not possible (see [6]).

- $N \cong \text{PSp}_4(3)$ . In this case  $|N| = 2^6 \cdot 3^4 \cdot 5$  and  $|\text{Out}(N)| = 2$ . From [2, Lemma 2.5] it follows that  $\{|X|, |Y|\} = \{2^5 \cdot 5, 3^4 \cdot 2^4\}$ . By order arguments we have that 2 and 5 divides either  $|N \cap A|$  or  $|N \cap B|$  and  $3^4$  divides the other. Then  $5 \in \pi$ , because there are no 2-elements in  $N$  centralizing a Sylow 5-subgroup of  $N$ . Also  $3 \in \pi$ , since a Sylow 3-subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing in  $\text{Aut}(N)$ . Consequently,  $G$  is a  $\pi$ -group, which is a contradiction.

- $N \cong M_{11}$ . In this case  $G = N$  is simple and  $\{|A|, |B|\} = \{55, 2^4 \cdot 3^2\}$ , which gives a contradiction with the fact that  $A_\pi \neq 1$  and  $A_{\pi'} \neq 1$ .

- $N \cong L_3(4)$  or  $N \cong L_3(7)$ . These cases can be excluded as said in the proof of Theorem 2.

- $N \cong L_3(5)$ . By [2, Lemma 2.5], one of the numbers  $|N \cap A|$  and  $|N \cap B|$  divides  $31 \cdot 3$  and the other divides  $2^4 \cdot 5^3$ . Hence the case  $G = N$  cannot occur by order arguments. So we may deduce that  $G \cong \text{Aut}(N)$  and  $|G/N| = 2$ . Since a Sylow 5-subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing in  $\text{Aut}(N)$ , this forces the primes 2 and 5 to be in the same set of primes. Recall also that  $2 \in \pi$  and  $B$  is a  $\pi$ -group, so we have  $|N \cap B| = 2^4 \cdot 5^3$  and  $|N \cap A| = 31 \cdot 3$ . Since a Sylow 31-subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing in  $\text{Aut}(N)$  (see [6]), we deduce that  $A$  should be a  $\pi$ -group, which is a contradiction.

•  $N \cong L_3(8)$ . Now  $|N| = 2^9 \cdot 3^2 \cdot 7^2 \cdot 73$ ,  $|\text{Out}(N)| = 2 \cdot 3$  and from [2, Lemma 2.5] it follows that one of the numbers  $|N \cap A|$  and  $|N \cap B|$  divides  $73 \cdot 3$ , and the other divides  $2^9 \cdot 7^2$ . The cases  $G = N$  and  $|G/N| = 2$  cannot occur by order arguments. Moreover, since  $G/N$  is a  $\pi$ -group, we have  $\{2, 3\} \subseteq \pi$ . The fact that  $B$  is a  $\pi$ -group and a Sylow 73-subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing forces that  $\pi = \{2, 3, 73\}$  and  $\pi' = \{7\}$ . The case  $|G/N| = 3$  and  $|N \cap A| = 2^9 \cdot 7^2$  cannot occur since a Sylow 2-subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing. So,  $|G/N| = 2 \cdot 3$  and  $|N \cap A| = 2^8 \cdot 7^2$ . But in this case  $N \cap A$  would be a normal subgroup of a Borel subgroup of  $N$  containing a central subgroup of order  $7^2$  which is a contradiction.

•  $N \cong L_4(2) \cong A_8$ . This case is not possible because there is no factorization of  $G$  with soluble factors.

•  $N \cong U_3(8)$ . Recall that  $|N| = 2^9 \cdot 3^4 \cdot 7 \cdot 19$ ,  $|\text{Out}(N)| = 2 \cdot 3^2$  and by [2, Lemma 2.5], it should be  $|G| \geq |N| \cdot 3^2$ . Moreover,  $G/N$  is a  $\pi$ -group and  $\{2, 3\} \subseteq \pi$ .

If  $|G/N| = 3^2$ , then  $\{|N \cap A|, |N \cap B|\} = \{3 \cdot 19, 2^9 \cdot 7 \cdot 3\}$ , and so the fact that a Sylow 19-subgroup is self-centralizing in  $N$  leads to  $\pi \cap \pi(G) = \{2, 3, 19\}$ . But if  $\pi' \cap \pi(G) = \{7\}$ , there would be an element of order 7 in  $N$  centralizing a Sylow 2-subgroup of  $N$ , a contradiction.

Now assume that  $|G/N| = 2 \cdot 3^2$  and so  $\{|N \cap A|, |N \cap B|\} = \{3 \cdot 19, 2^8 \cdot 7 \cdot 3\}$  or  $\{|N \cap A|, |N \cap B|\} = \{3 \cdot 19, 2^9 \cdot 7 \cdot 3\}$ . In any case it follows  $19 \in \pi$ , since a Sylow 19-subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing. But  $\pi' \cap \pi(G) = \{7\}$  cannot occur again because this would mean in both cases that a Borel subgroup of  $N$  would have a subgroup of order 7 centralizing a subgroup of order  $2^8$ , which is not possible.

•  $N \cong L_2(q)$ ,  $q > 3$  a Mersenne prime.

In this case, we know from [2, Lemma 2.5] that  $|\text{Out}(N)| = 2$  and  $\{X, Y\} = \{N_N(N_q), D_{q+1}\}$ , with  $N_q \in \text{Syl}_q(N)$  and  $D_{q+1}$  a dihedral group of order  $q + 1 = 2^n$ , for some  $n \geq 2$ . (For  $q = 2^3 - 1 = 7$  there exist another factorization which will be considered later.)

Since  $D_{q+1}$  is a 2-group, it follows that  $N \cap A \subseteq N_N(N_q)$ . Now by order arguments  $q$  divides  $|N \cap A|$ . Since a Sylow  $q$ -subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing in  $\text{Aut}(N)$ , we deduce that  $A$  is either a  $\pi$ -group or a  $\pi'$ -group which is a contradiction.

If  $q = 7$ , it might be also possible that  $\{X, Y\} = \{N_N(N_q), S_4\}$  with  $N_q \in \text{Syl}_q(N)$  and  $S_4$  the symmetric group of degree 4. Since  $N_q$  is self-centralizing in  $\text{Aut}(N)$ , we deduce that  $N \cap B \subseteq N_N(N_q)$  and  $N \cap A \subseteq S_4$ . Then the factorization  $A = A_\pi \times A_{\pi'}$  with  $A_{\pi'} \neq 1$  and  $A_\pi \neq 1$  is not possible.

- $N \cong L_2(2^n)$ , for either  $n = 3$  or  $2^n + 1 > 5$  a Fermat prime.

Set  $q = 2^n$ . Recall that, in this case,  $|N| = q(q^2 - 1)$ , and  $\text{Out}(N)$  is a cyclic group of order  $n$ . From [2, Lemma 2.5] it follows that  $\{X, Y\} = \{N_N(N_2), D_{2(q+1)}\}$ , with  $N_2 \in \text{Syl}_2(N)$ ,  $|N_N(N_2)| = q(q - 1)$  and  $D_{2(q+1)}$  a dihedral group of order  $2(q + 1)$ . Since the subgroups of prime order  $q + 1$  in  $N$  are self-centralizing in  $\text{Aut}(N)$  and  $q + 1$  does not divide  $|\text{Out}(N)|$ , we deduce that  $N \cap A \not\leq D_{2(q+1)}$ . Hence  $N \cap A \leq N_N(N_2)$ . But again the fact that a Sylow 2-subgroup of  $N$  is self-centralizing in  $\text{Aut}(N)$  provides the final contradiction.  $\square$

*Remark.* In [12, Final examples, 3] it has been shown that the conclusion of Theorem 3 is not true for the groups  $L_2(2^n)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , except if either  $n = 3$  or  $2^n + 1$  is a Fermat prime.

Next we show that Theorem 3 is also false for groups involving  $L_2(q)$ ,  $q > 3$  odd, except if  $q$  is a Mersenne prime. (We note that  $L_2(4) \cong L_2(5)$ .) To see this we consider the group  $G = \text{PGL}_2(q)$ ,  $q$  odd. Note that  $|G : L_2(q)| = 2$ . Thus  $|G| = q(q^2 - 1)$  and it is known that this group has cyclic subgroups of orders  $(q - 1)$  and  $(q + 1)$ . Then  $G = AB$  where  $A \cong C_{q+1}$  is a cyclic group of order  $q + 1$  and  $B = N_G(G_p)$ ,  $G_p \in \text{Syl}_p(G)$ , is a subgroup of order  $q(q - 1)$ . Clearly  $\pi(A) \cap \pi(B) = \{2\}$ . Set  $\pi = \pi(N_G(G_p))$  and note that  $2 \in \pi$ . Then  $A = O_\pi(A) \times O_{\pi'}(A)$  is a  $\pi$ -decomposable group and  $B$  is a  $\pi$ -group, but  $O_\pi(A)B$  is not a subgroup, except if  $q + 1$  is a power of 2, that is,  $q$  is a Mersenne prime, in which case  $G$  is a  $\pi$ -group.

As a consequence of Theorems 2 and 3 we deduce the following result for an arbitrary set of primes  $\pi$ .

**Corollary 1.** *Let  $\pi$  be a set of primes. Let the group  $G = AB$  be the product of two soluble  $\pi$ -decomposable subgroups  $A = A_\pi \times A_{\pi'}$  and  $B = B_\pi \times B_{\pi'}$ . Assume that the following simple groups are not involved in  $G$ :*

- $L_2(2^n)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , except if either  $n = 3$  or  $q = 2^n + 1 > 5$  is a Fermat prime,
- $L_2(q)$ ,  $q$  odd, except if  $q$  is a Mersenne prime.

*Then the composition factors of  $G$  belong to one of the following types:*

- (1)  $\pi$ -groups,
- (2)  $\pi'$ -groups,
- (3) the following groups in the list of Fisman [7, Theorem 1.1]:

- (i)  $L_2(2^n)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , with either  $n = 3$  or  $q = 2^n + 1 > 5$  is a Fermat prime,
- (ii)  $L_2(q)$  with  $q > 3$  and  $q$  is a Mersenne prime,
- (iii)  $L_3(3)$ ,
- (iv)  $M_{11}$ .

*In particular, let the group  $G = AB$  be the product of the two soluble  $\pi$ -decomposable subgroups  $A = A_\pi \times A_{\pi'}$  and  $B = B_\pi \times B_{\pi'}$  and assume that the simple groups  $L_2(q)$ ,  $q > 3$ ,  $L_3(3)$  and  $M_{11}$  are not involved in  $G$ . Then the group  $G$  is  $\pi$ -separable.*

*Proof:* The last statement of the corollary follows directly from the first part. Assume that this one is not true and let  $G$  be a counterexample of minimal order. Since  $G/M$  satisfies the corresponding hypotheses for each normal subgroup  $M$ , we may assume that  $G$  has a unique minimal normal subgroup, say  $N$ . We can also deduce that  $O_{\pi'}(G) = O_\pi(G) = 1$ , and so  $N$  is non-abelian. Assume, for instance, that  $2 \in \pi'$ . From Theorem 2 we have that  $A_\pi B_\pi = B_\pi A_\pi$  and, by Lemma 2, we deduce that  $[A_\pi^G, B_\pi^G] = 1$ , which is a contradiction to the fact that  $N$  is non-abelian, unless either  $A_\pi = 1$  or  $B_\pi = 1$ . Now applying Theorem 3 in a similar way we deduce that either  $A_{\pi'} = 1$  or  $B_{\pi'} = 1$ . Then, in any of the cases,  $G$  would be the product of a  $\pi$ -group and a  $\pi'$ -group and the conclusion follows from [7, Theorem 1.1].  $\square$

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